Fowl Feathered Review
№ 194

Issue 194: When Your Childhood Home Remembers You Differently (And It's Right)

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."
--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

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If this magazine does not meet your expectations,
please return it to us in its original condition
for a full refund, minus the cost of enlightenment.

Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded)
To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. Craft (or Culinary Construct): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. The Gatekeeper: Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, “China Wok Habitue,” suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it’s more likely a testament to the local takeout joint’s generous portions. (Please note: Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. Format: Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (Pro-tip: The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. The Cycle Continues: We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. The Sandwiches: Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. Leap Year Follies: Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

“Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco.”

— Virgil, The Aeneid

Of Martians, Marx, & the Metaphysics of Plunging

by Dom Caswell

The late morning light in York, Maine, clung to the bay window of the hundred-year-old cottage on Short Sands, making the dust bunnies dance like tiny, oblivious constellations. It was a cottage built for durability, not grace, with shingle siding weathered to the color of forgotten tea. Inside, the air hummed with the faint, almost imperceptible static of deep time, a temporal echo from a hundred summers and winters. The cottage, inherited by Mrs. Wentworth, smelled faintly of salt, old wood, and the peculiar, medicinal aroma of her daily regimen.

The world outside Mrs. Wentworth's cottage, specifically York, Maine, was a postcard of coastal New England charm. Lobster boats bobbed in the harbor, their buoys like colorful punctuation marks on the steel-gray water. Tourists, even in the encroaching chill of late autumn, still clustered near the famous Nubble Lighthouse, their cameras clicking. The town, with its antique shops and clam shacks, felt anchored to a past that Mrs. Wentworth seemed determined to outlive, if only to spite the inevitable.

Her domain, at this precise moment, was the passenger seat of her aging, pea-green Saab 900. The car, a relic from a more aerodynamic and practical era, smelled of worn leather and the ghost of countless Dunkin' Donuts coffees. Mrs. Wentworth, a woman whose 87 years had etched themselves into her skin like an intricate, indecipherable map, was carefully strapped in. Her bones, fragile from osteoporosis and a series of alarming falls that had precipitated my employment, seemed to hum with a low, vibrational insistence. She insisted, with the kind of unwavering resolve usually reserved for mountain climbers or very stubborn toddlers, on being positioned just so.

The inciting incident, for most days, was the relentless insistence of Mrs. Wentworth that her personal mission – identifying extraterrestrial drivers – begin. "Mars, you see, it's not so far once you get past the bureaucracy," she'd declare, her voice raspy but firm. Today was no different. Her eyes, though clouded by macular degeneration, still held a fierce, unsettling glint. She clutched a pair of enormous Zeiss 20x60 binoculars like a seasoned sniper. Next to them lay a military-grade SureFire M6 Guardian spotlight, its chrome barrel gleaming menacingly. And, perched precariously on her lap, was a Canon EOS R5 with an RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1L IS USM lens, its black body a sleek, silent promise of photographic conquest. The rationale for the spotlight, she'd explained last week, was "for dark winter days, when the Martian spacecraft are less visible, but the drivers... oh, the drivers still give off a certain glow." My name is Tom Goodwin. I'm thirty-two, with a perpetually rumpled beard and hands that know their way around a five-string banjo almost as well as they know how to gently hoist an elderly woman into a Saab. My nurse's scrubs were a pale blue, faded from countless washes, much like the sky over York on a particularly hazy day. You know, a clean conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.

The emotional core of our daily ritual resided in the quiet moments between her pronouncements. It was in the rhythmic static of the Belgian FM station she insisted on, its unfamiliar language a soothing, almost hypnotic counterpoint to the insistent hum of the Saab's engine. I'd set her phone to Radio 1 (VRT) from Flanders, then Bluetooth it to the car's ancient stereo. The Flemish words, liquid and unfamiliar, seemed to flow around us, creating a small, insulated world within the vastness of York. It was here, in this strange aural bubble, that Mrs. Wentworth often drifted into memories, as vivid and startling as the sudden clang of a buoy bell.

The crucial detail, the small but profoundly significant object, was the little silver locket Mrs. Wentworth always wore. It lay nestled against her throat, barely visible beneath the collar of her cardigan. Inside, I knew from a previous, rambling confession, was a faded, sepia-toned photograph of her grandmother, stern-faced and unsmiling, standing in front of a rustic sign that read: "The Sea Mist Cottages - Ogunquit." This locket,

unremarkable to the casual observer, was the portal to her deeper narratives, the key to unlocking the curious, non-linear architecture of her mind. You know, a bus station is where a bus stops. A train station is where a train stops. On my desk, I have a workstation.

The hidden truth, the ultimate resolution to the mystery of Mrs. Wentworth, was not to be found in the passing cars or the imagined Martians, but in the tapestry of her anecdotes. "You know, Tom," she said, her voice thin but surprisingly clear over a Flemish pop song about lost love, "they say it's six degrees of separation, but I always thought it was more like two or three. My grandmother, she ran a summer cottage villa in Ogunquit. Just down the coast. And Groucho," she paused, as if savoring the name, "Groucho Marx, bless his mischievous soul, would do summer stock theater nearby. He'd stay in one of our cottages with his wife and two kids. Little Arthur, he was always getting into the blueberry bushes." Meanwhile, the phone, perched on the dashboard, vibrated with insistent enthusiasm. It was the delivery service.

The relationship crucible was the space between us, filled with her stories and my patient, sometimes amused, sometimes bewildered silence. "One sweltering July day," she continued, her gaze fixed on a passing Honda Civic, "Groucho came up to Grandma and declared, 'Madam, I have a craving that only a mixing bowl, and I mean a large mixing bowl, of fresh blueberries can satisfy!' Grandma, she was a no-nonsense woman, but she loved a challenge. She picked every blueberry on that property, Tom. Every single one. Brought him a bowl so full it practically overflowed." A wry smile touched her lips. "He was ever so surprised when she brought it. Said he'd only been half-joking. But he ate every last one. Said they were 'better than a punchline and twice as blue.'"

"Mrs. Wentworth," I interrupted, trying to catch her attention, "the phone. It's about your mini-observatory delivery. Do you want it Saturday or Monday?" Her gaze, however, was already elsewhere. She had clicked on the Saab's built-in television screen, which for some reason, despite all logic, received an uninterrupted feed of the "Ted Talk: The Kudzu Angry Hornet Toilet Plunger – A Revolution in Plumbing Efficacy." The Philips 32" screen flickered, its glow a sickly yellow, casting shadows that twisted like

the spirals of a clogged drain. Harold Grady stood before the audience, his face a mask of feverish conviction, his voice a grotesque symphony of existential despair, campy cadence, and delirious grandeur. The room was a cathedral of the absurd, where urban professionals in tailored suits and Geritol enthusiasts in woolen sweaters sat in uneasy communion, their dentures glinting like the teeth of some ancient, unspoken horror.

Harold's voice began as a low, rumbling drone, a sound that seemed to emanate from the marrow of the earth itself. "You think," he said, his words spilling out in a tangle of clauses and semicolons, "that the toilet is merely a vessel for the excretions of the body, a mechanical contraption of porcelain and plastic, a relic of industrial progress, a monument to the banality of modern life, but no, no, no—it is a portal! A threshold! A labyrinth of liquid and void! The clog is not a mere obstruction; it is the screaming of the soul! The suffocation of the self! And the Kudzu Angry Hornet—oh, the Kudzu Angry Hornet—it is not a plunger, it is the hammer of the gods, the scalpel of the abyss, the revelation of the unspoken!" Mrs. Wentworth, Canon camera temporarily forgotten, was furiously scribbling notes on a pad. "He's onto something, Tom," she murmured, without looking at me. "The Martians, they probably have similar plumbing issues. It's all about fluid dynamics, you see."

Harold gestured to the screen, where a diagram of the Kudzu plunger pulsed with a sickly green light. "Behold!" he cried, his voice rising to a theatrical crescendo. "The angry hornet! A beast of fury! Its head, a vibrating maw of red and black, its handle, a scepter of resistance! It does not merely clear the clog—it unleashes the chaos within! It is not a tool; it is a ritual! A pact with the unseen! You ask, 'What if it fails?' I say to you, 'Then you are already lost!'" A sharp, almost metallic clack from the Saab's dashboard. She'd accidentally engaged the parking brake.

Then, from the audience in the "Ted Talk," a woman in a floral dress, her face strangely familiar, stood up. "Harold?" she called out, her voice reedy but clear, cutting through the metaphysical drone. "Is that you, little Harold? It's Mama Dolores. Your den mother from the 3-1 Grill in Guyana." Harold Grady, mid-monologue on the existential dread of a blocked drain, froze. His eyes, which had been dilated twin black holes, suddenly

shrunk to frightened pinpricks. "Mama?" he whispered, his voice cracking, regressing into the whimper of a forgotten child. "Mama, I... I just wanted to show them the plunger. The angry one." Two burly security guards in dark suits appeared from the wings, moving with the practiced efficiency of highly-paid existential bouncers. Behind them, two individuals from the Cult Awareness Network, easily identifiable by their sensible shoes and urgent expressions, began to approach the stage. One carried a box of Hostess Twinkies, the other, a tablet displaying a brightly colored Korean drama.

Mrs. Wentworth tapped her pen against her notepad. "Existence, Tom. It's always about existence. Even when it's about a toilet." As Harold Grady was gently, but firmly, escorted off the set, babbling "Mama, they don't understand the void!" and Mrs. Wentworth herself was being approached by the Cult Awareness Network, a strange quiet settled over the Saab. My banjo lessons, it seemed, had only prepared me for so much. If you'd like to support my continued philosophical exploration of cosmic motorists and escape this sweet, blueberry-scented hell, you can find me on Patreon.

Save the seal, bro.
MARKET BASKET
POLICE
POLICED
RECTAL USE ONLY
HUMANELY EXTERMINATED
RECTAL USE USE ONLY
HUMANELY EXTERMINATED
CAUTION: You may become a DAddy

MORE FOR YOUR DOLLAR

By Francis Stanwell

The very air inside the Demoulas Market Basket in Claremont, New Hampshire, vibrated with a unique resonance, a low, persistent thrum beneath the saccharine glaze of the Muzak. It was the sound of capitalism gently exhaling, a bland, easy-listening rendition of some forgotten jazz standard oozing from unseen speakers, washing over the rows of gleaming shelves and the distinctive red-and-white tiled floor that stretched out like an endless, edible chessboard. Here, amidst the bustling choreography of shopping carts and the quiet dignity of the checkout lines, where the familiar crimson Market Basket vests moved with a practiced efficiency (a faint echo, perhaps, of some long-past "GRAND OPENING" fanfare, glimpsed now only on faded photographs), he materialized.

He moved. Not walked, not amled, but moved, a kinetic sculpture of incongruity, a living Dadaist manifesto strutting past the artisanal cheese. His hair, a five-week thicket of dark, uncombed rebellion, framed a beard that seemed less grown than manifested, a hirsute declaration of independence from the tyranny of the razor. The biker jacket, a carapace of worn black leather, creaked a low, rhythmic protest with each purposeful stride, a counterpoint to the unexpected gleam of black and white wingtips, polished to a mirror sheen, reflecting the linoleum tiles like distorted chessboards. The fabric of his black t-shirt, emblazoned with the defiant raccoon and the philosophical query "MORE TRASH CAN...LESS TRASH CAN'T," taut across his chest, subtly rippled with a subtle, existential breeze as he advanced.

From the small radio clipped precariously to his jacket lapel, **Nana Mouskouri**'s voice, that crystalline, almost impossibly pure instrument, soared, utterly unconcerned with the price of organic kale. It was "White Roses of Athens," a poignant lament for separation and hopeful return, its melody a delicate filigree woven through the mundane symphony of shopping carts and scanning beeps. "Till the white rose blooms again," she

sang, her voice a beacon of melancholic beauty, "you must leave me, leave me lonely." And yet, he was not lonely. He was profoundly, vociferously, connected.
His cellphone, clutched to his ear with a hand that bore the faint, almost historical, calluses of a life lived beyond the confines of a grocery aisle, blared forth the other half of a conversation that, to the casual, bewildered ear, sounded less like human discourse and more like a fever dream narrated by a deranged marine biologist. "No, Bobby," he boomed, his voice a gravelly counterpoint to Nana's ethereal tones, echoing slightly off a pyramid of canned peaches, "the smaller one, the bait knife! Less chance of tearing, for God's sake, we're talking about Buttons here, your best friend!"

He paused, mid-stride, before the frozen seafood, his gaze, intense and unblinkling, fixed on a bag of pre-cooked shrimp. "Are you sure it's the appendix? He's definitely bloated on the lower right side? And he's vocalizing that high-pitched squeal?" He glanced toward a somewhat depleted section of shelves, a lone ladder resting idly against them, a monument to a recent restocking effort. "Bobby, listen to me, stay calm. You got this." With a practiced, almost surgical flick of the wrist, a small, adhesive rectangle appeared from nowhere, adhering itself with perverse precision to the shrimp bag. "**RECTAL USE ONLY,**" it declared in stark, black Helvetica, a tiny, bureaucratic absurdity in the face of impending crustacean consumption.

He moved on, past the artisanal breads, the smell of yeast and warmth momentarily piercing the Nana Mouskouri haze, his eyes scanning, seeking, categorizing. The police badge, authentic-looking to a degree that suggested either meticulous forgery or a profound misunderstanding of impersonation, glinted at his waist, a silent, gold-plated question mark in the narrative of his presence. He rounded a corner, the radio volume seemingly increasing as he approached the dairy section, Nana's voice now a full-throated, operatic lament for a world that simply refused to align with common sense.

"The rum? No, Bobby, not for him!" he bellowed, causing a woman contemplating low-fat yogurt to flinch. "That's for you! You need to steady your hand. Just a swig. And the good news is, seals have pretty robust immune systems. And Nana's got your back, she's always got your back."

Another sticker, this one applied with the solemnity of a papal bull, landed on a package of organic chicken breasts. "**HUMANELY EXTERMINATED,**" it proclaimed, a chillingly polite euphemism that seemed to drain the very life from the plastic-wrapped poultry.

His pilgrimage continued, a peripatetic performance art piece, culminating at the free DIY coffee station. The aroma of stale coffee and lukewarm milk filled the air, a humble, democratic offering in this temple of commerce. He approached it with the gravity of a high priest, his movements precise, almost ritualistic. The styrofoam cup, a flimsy chalice, was filled with a practiced hand, the black liquid steaming faintly. He took a sip, his eyes, dark and knowing, surveying the rows of liquor bottles nearby.

The whiskey aisle beckoned, a shimmering corridor of amber and emerald. With a flourish that suggested both a conjurer and a saboteur, he produced a third type of sticker. One by one, with a methodical, almost loving care, they appeared on the necks of various whiskey bottles, from the cheapest well brands to the most venerable single malts. "**CAUTION: You may become a Daddy,**" each declared, a stark, prophetic warning against the intoxicating perils of procreation, a dadaist pronouncement on the biological imperative. The absurdity was so profound, so utterly out of context, that it circled back on itself to become a kind of truth, a whispered, drunken oracle in the fluorescent glow.

He stood there, amidst the cacophony of Nana Mouskouri, the frantic, whispered instructions for seal surgery, and the silent, subversive declarations of his stickers, a man utterly at peace with his own magnificent mania. His black t-shirt, emblazoned with the defiant raccoon and the philosophical query "MORE TRASH CAN LESS TRASH CAN'T," seemed to ripple with a subtle, existential breeze.

Then, a hand, firm and unexpected, landed on his shoulder. He turned, slowly, the wingtips pivoting with a surprising grace. Standing there, a figure of prosaic authority, a man in a red Market Basket vest, his expression a curious blend of bewilderment and grudging admiration (not unlike the smiling manager from the coupons), was the Demoulas Market Basket store manager.

"Son," the manager began, his voice surprisingly gentle, cutting through the Nana Mouskouri and the distant cries of a hypothetical seal, "I've been watching you. You got a certain... flair. A way of making things... memorable." He paused, his gaze sweeping over the "RECTAL USE ONLY" shrimp, the "HUMANELY EXTERMINATED" chicken, and the "CAUTION: You may become a Daddy" whiskey. A faint, almost imperceptible smile touched his lips.

"You know," he continued, leaning in conspiratorially, "we're always looking for good people. Someone with your... initiative. You ever thought about a job here? We could use a man like you."

The man with the beard, the badge, and the blaring Nana Mouskouri simply blinked, the free coffee still steaming in his hand, the distant wail of a pet seal momentarily forgotten. The silence, though brief, was profound, a tiny, perfect void in the supermarket's endless hum.

ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK
SPEAK 'n SPRES°

EXCERPTS FROM LINER NOTES FOR THE ALBUM

Enter at Your Own Risk, or The Milkweed Manifesto: A Scrapyard Cantata in Four Rotations, Revised for the Sunlit Uplands

(RECORDED ON A TOYS R US TAPE RECORDER, SALVAGED FROM THE GLOVE COMPARTMENT OF A 1987 PONTIAC FIERO REPURPOSED INTO A SOLAR-POWERED BLENDER. THE XYLOPHONE, SOURCED FROM A GOODWILL IN OSHKOSH, NOW TUNED TO THE FREQUENCIES OF JOY, SINGS IN F-SHARP MAJOR. A SPEAK N SPELL, REPROGRAMMED WITH THE COLLECTED WORKS OF RACHEL CARSON, INTERMITTENTLY CHIRPS: "I AM THE ANGEL OF TUESDAY. I SMELL THE FUTURE. IT SMELLS LIKE AVOCADO." THE MIDDLE SCHOOL ORCHESTRA OF DECATUR, ILLINOIS—CONDUCTED BY A MAN WHO BELIEVES HE IS BOTH THE REINCARNATION OF JOHN MUIR AND A TRANSIENT MONARCH—TUNEFULLY RETUNES ITSELF INTO HARMONY WITH THE BIOSPHERE.)

1. Adagio for the Awakened: The Recording Begins, or It Might!

Let us posit, dear listener, a hypothesis: that art is merely the residue of hope, pressed into grooves. Picture, then, a dawn in the hinterlands of Scranton, Pennsylvania, where our protagonist—a man who insists he is the reincarnation of both Henry David Thoreau

and a 1978 AMC Pacer retrofitted with a vegetable oil engine—dons a pair of headphones fashioned from garden hose and hemp resin. His name? Clive Z. Blemish, a failed semiotician turned avant-garde peanut historian turned vegan smoothie alchemist, currently subsisting on a diet of milkweed nectar and existential exhilaration.

Clive's internal monologue (delivered in the style of a man who has just discovered compost tea):

"Am I not a lark, a sparrow among sparrows, to immortalize this symphony of symbiosis on a medium so humble, so debased, as a cassette tape once used to record the mewing of a neighbor's cat? Yet what is purity but a bourgeois construct, eh? What is contamination but the sincerest form of truth? Consider the nut: once noble, now paste. Once sacred, now a vector for microbiotic communion! Is this not the human condition? To be ground, again and again, into a substance that nourishes and delights?"

Outside, the guard dog—Baron von Wienerhund, a dachshund of Teutonic solemnity—gnaws on a tofu pup imbued with the ashes of Buckminster Fuller. The fence trembles like the conscience of Stewart Parnell's ghost, now running a CSA in the astral plane. Criswell-esque dialogue (from the xylophone player, a woman who claims to be the ghost of Clara Schumann and also a licensed acupuncturist):

"Friends, the dawn is nigh! I've seen it in the iridescence of the oat milk jar! We are but instruments in the hands of a playful condiment! Last Tuesday, a squirrel told me—nay, sang—'The blanching begins at dusk!' And so I play, I PLAY, lest my fingers forget the shape of rapture!"

The Speak n Spell erupts: "TO ERR IS HUMAN. TO ATE IS DIVINE. TO RECYCLE IS TRANSCENDENT."

Let us linger, if you will, on the price of copper, that most mercurial of metals. In 2014, a ton of No. 1 bare bright wire—the kind that snakes through abandoned factories like the veins of industrial ghosts—commanded $6,314. By 2016, it had collapsed to $4,700 amid

China's manufacturing slowdown. Then, in 2020, as the world collectively Zoomed and charged electric vehicles, copper rebounded to $7,800. By 2024, it danced near $9,000, buoyed by wind turbines and the global demand for grid-scale batteries. Iron, meanwhile, languished: $150 per ton in 2015, rising to $320 in 2024, still a pauper's metal. Aluminum? Volatile as a teenager. In 2018, it peaked at $2,700; today, it hovers at $2,100, a victim of trade wars and the eternal human compulsion to discard soda cans. Clive, scavenging brass from a defunct radiator, thinks: How poetic that the cheapest thing here is worth more than the CEO's soul.

11. Scherzo with a Wrench: The Middle School Orchestra Ascends and Ascends

Scene: A rehearsal. The orchestra, clad in mismatched thrift-store tuxedos (one violinist wears a lobster on a leash, now vegan, gnawing a carrot) attempts to perform a fugue based on the PCA bankruptcy filings, reimagined as a hymn to regenerative agriculture. The conductor—a man who has not slept since 1983 and believes the moon is a giant gnocchi filled with chia seeds—gestures wildly, his baton a knitting needle stolen from a nun's yarn bomb.

"The peanut spreads its gospel through the guts of orphans the xylophone hums a psalm of rust the tapes hiss like the whisper of Judas in the pantry of the condemned and the dog he dreams of a symphony scored for teeth and wire and the taste of pennies and the taste of lies and the taste of the earth when it coughs up your father's boots and the soil says 'I FORGIVE YOU'..."

A cello string snaps—but is quickly replaced with a hemp fiber from Clive's smoothie stash. The lobster releases the trombone mute and nibbles a beet. Clive mutters: "Genius is 1% inspiration, 99% compost."
Let us linger, if you will, on the samovar. Born in 18th-century Persia as a device to boil water for tea, it traveled northward, morphing into the Russian icon we know today: a brass teapot perched atop a samovar's chimney, where embers glowed like the eyes of wolves. By the 19th century, Tula's factories churned them out; they became a bourgeois

status symbol, a sign of refinement, of leisure, of the ability to sip tea for six hours while the peasants starved. Today, samovars gather dust in antique shops, their purpose forgotten—until Clive presses one into service as a paperweight for his milkweed smoothie recipe cards. He thinks: How poetic that a vessel for warmth becomes a monument to resilience.

111. Lamento del Parnell, Reimagined: The Salmonella Arias Uplifted

Flashback: Stewart Parnell in 2007, licking a peanut butter smear off a ledger. His eyes—two desiccated figs—stare into the void. He types an email: "SHIP IT. GOD WILL CLEANSE US." Cut to 2024: Stewart, reborn as a permaculture consultant in Vermont, now grows elderberries and apologizes to salmonella in daily affirmations.

"Our hero—Clive, the Zelig of zymurgy—now splices the audio: the cough of a nun (recording a podcast on plant-based mindfulness), the scream of a squirrel (safely relocated), the drone of a federal indictment (now a lo-fi beat underlaid with birdsong). He layers them like the strata of a community garden. Is this music? Yes. It is the sound of a civilization buttoning its hemp vest after a raw food cleanse, of a CEO sipping chia fresca as the sepsis reverses."

Let us linger, if you will, on the convergence of folk and lo-fi. Folk music—a grassroots oral history, a protest sung by calloused hands. Lo-fi—a genre born in basements, with hiss and vinyl crackle as percussion, a manifesto of imperfection. They meet where the banjo samples a porch swing's creak, where a voice warbles over a loop of rain. Lo-fi folk is the sound of a generation that grew up on Bon Iver and Joni Mitchell, that finds poetry in the static of a Walkman taped to a milkweed pod. Clive, spinning a vinyl copy of Harvest on his bicycle-powered turntable, thinks: How poetic that the past is never dead. It's just waiting to be remixed.

"I saw the guard dog dancing with the Speak n Spell in the moonlight and the xylophone was weeping maple syrup and the children they sang of a land where the peanuts bloom

eternal and the rats they file lawsuits and the air it hums a tune called Gloved in Latex, Baptized in Lysol..."
The samovar on the album cover exhales steam, spelling out "MAO" in cursive, then erasing it with a puff of organic mint vapor.

IV. Coda: The Crack in the Cosmic Jukebox Healed

The album concludes with 13 minutes of silence, followed by a hidden track: a monologue by Baron von Wienerhund, the dachshund, delivered in a blend of Aramaic and Criswell-esque prophecy.
Translated fragment:

"Beware the second verse, for it is the first verse reversed and salted with regret. The peanut speaks still, from the belly of the earth, from the anus of God. Play this album backwards and you will hear the screams of the 714. Play it forwards and you will hear the sneeze of capitalism. Play it at all, and your speakers will weep—then laugh, then sprout microgreens."
Final line (Clive, channeling Buckley-esque grandiloquence):
"We'll make a profit that fuels the revolution."

ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK: NOT AN ALBUM, BUT A NARRATIVE GREENHOUSE, WHERE DECAY BECOMES COMPOST, AND EVERY HISS OF THE TAPE IS A WHISPER OF THE POSSIBLE.

BONUS FEATURE: MILKWEED SMOOTHIE RECIPE (CLIVE'S NOTES)

MILKWEED PODS (HARVESTED ETHICALLY), OAT MILK, A TOUCH OF WILDFLOWER HONEY, AND A SINGLE DROP OF FERMENTED KELP. BLEND UNTIL THE REVOLUTIONS RISE.

An Examination of Aqueous Dislocation and Quantitative Anomalies: A Hartford Confluence

By Dr. Eleanor Vance (Department of Quantitative Sociology, Eastern Michigan University)
Dr. Reginald "Reg" Pratz (School of Environmental Science, University of Southern Maine)
Dr. Beverly "Bev" Kincaid (Division of Material Culture Studies, North Dakota State University)
Dr. Wilfredo Zhai, Professor of Sociological Data Analysis and Quantitative Methodology, State University of New York at Albany

(A voice booms over the sound of a thousand harp arpeggios)
"Coming live from Hartford, Connecticut, it's the Cake of the Week!"

An angel food cake, impossibly white and fluffy, sat center stage on an electric lazy Susan. It was adorned with a constellation of LED lights, tiny pinpricks of blue and green, and ringed by a phalanx of sparklers that hissed and spat glittering gold dust. Around the base, like miniature guardians, several Gardener snakes, scales shimmering under the lights, seemed to coil and uncoil, their heads twitching as if in anticipation. Behind this sugary tableau, a massive sheet of rhinestones shimmered, catching every flicker of light and transforming it into a dizzying array of bokeh, a kaleidoscope of soft, out-of-focus brilliance.

"Look at this—a cake for a snake charmer's retirement party! What, did they run out of actual talent? And speaking of things artificial, are those your teeth, glittering in the background? Because my grandma's dentures have more personality."

"Hey, easy, big shot! This cake has more class than your whole family reunion. At least these snakes aren't trying to sell me a time-share. And your jokes? They're so old, they need a good soaking in a glass of water every night."

"Time-share? You couldn't afford a share of a gumball, pal. And these snakes look like they just escaped from a bad magic act. Where's the rabbit? Probably clinging to your keychain, trying to make a getaway from this whole sad spectacle."

"Funny, you look like you just escaped from a bad tailor. What's with the suit, did you lose a bet with a leisure suit convention? And your wit? It's as sharp as a butter knife after a root canal. You're so old, your dentures have their own social security numbers!"

"At least my suit fits! That cake looks like it’s been through a blender and then put back together by a committee of chimps. And those lights? You trying to land a plane in here, or just blind us all? Honestly, you could use those sparklers to find your way to the bathroom in the middle of the night, if your eyesight hasn't completely gone with your natural teeth."

"We're trying to elevate the atmosphere, something you wouldn't know about. What are those, your teeth, glittering in the background? Hope you got permission from the dentist. And speaking of missing things, where's your sense of humor? Did it fall out with your last incisor?"

"Oh, a comedian! You're so funny, the only thing laughing is your accountant, looking at your tax returns. This whole setup screams 'low budget Vegas act' that got lost on the way to Toledo. And frankly, this cake looks like it's been in a fight with a set of ill-fitting dentures and lost."

"Toledo? You couldn't find your way out of a phone booth with GPS, a map, and a sherpa. And for your information, this is cutting-edge décor. You're just jealous you're not getting any cake. Probably couldn't chew it anyway, with those gums of yours."

The glittering scene suddenly vanishes, replaced by a waterlogged living room—chaotic, dripping, and filled with debris. A weary woman in a fuchsia track suit, suspended by a cable from the ceiling, slowly revolving, points her trembling cane at a water stain creeping halfway up the wall.

"The audacity," she mumbles, "of the water to just... be there. It's almost sentient in its defiance."

She squints at a tablet in Elara's hands.

"Two-point three percent?" she rasped. "That's all we are now—a footnote in the PowerPoint apocalypse. You kids think you're analyzing data? Nah. You're just giving the Carfax on a spinning disaster. Every dent, every recall, every red flag laid bare. Just don't ask what the engine sounds like when it finally gives out."

She swings her cane toward a floating shopping cart.

"And speaking of engines, look at them—testament to the triumph of consumerism over common sense! Even the apocalypse requires a well-stocked pantry, apparently!"

The tremor begins not as a rumble but a low, resonant thrumming that vibrates through the very bones of the Connecticut earth. Framed certificates on the wall rattle; outside, the scent of ozone and something metallic—like ancient pennies—fills the air.

It's a Tuesday—or maybe a Wednesday—days folding in upon themselves like poorly laundered linen, smeared across the calendar by the unblinking eye of the present. The adolescents, each a self-contained universe humming with its own gravity, feel it first in the soles of their specialized sneakers, then up their spines—a tuning fork struck against their nervous systems, resonating with a frequency only they discern.

"One in thirty-one," thinks Elara, her fingers spiraling the iridescent facets of her fidget spinner—a miniature galaxy in her palm, its silent whir a counterpoint to the world's

guttural groan. The number, a persistent ghost, echoes from the phantom reports she absorbed.

"Three-point two percent," whispers a voice, a grain of sand beneath her eyelid. She presses her noise-canceling headphones, turning the cacophony into a distant throb, allowing the internal chorus of data to swell.

The woman in the track suit, slowly rotating mid-air, swings her cane to point at Elara's head.

"Headphones," she announces flatly, "A modern-day monastic cell, only with better bass."

The flood begins—not as a wave but as a slow, inevitable seep—a tide of the mundane made monstrous, bruised plums, old tea, the deepest parts of a dream. It laps at foundations, surges, turning streets into canals of debris, where skeletal fish—discarded shopping carts—bob and spin.

They navigate, not fleeing, but exploring—each cart a vessel, laden with sacred totems: plushies with button eyes, glowing tablets, whirring fidget spinners—all under the water's sickly hue.

The woman in the track suit gestures wildly toward a bobbing cart.

"A testament," she declares, "to consumerism's triumph over common sense. Even the apocalypse demands a stocked pantry."

"Be brave, compadre!" she adds softly. "You're sizing up prospects at a Kentucky juke joint on a Friday night. Some hunt for two-step, others for free shrimp. If you don't like the odds, buy more dice."

The lurid orange sun casts distorted shadows, drowning mailboxes like drowned sentinels, their flags at half-mast. A discarded mannequin arm floats by, fingers splayed in a desperate wave—a macabre greeting from the submerged world.

"A 22% increase since 2020," murmurs Jasper, muffled by his soundproof headphones, dark lenses mirroring the fractured sky.

"A 375% increase since monitoring began in 2000," he adds, adjusting his sunglasses.
And then, the shift.

A silent, powerful undertow pulls—an unspoken current beneath the current, unraveling order.

"For the first time," thinks Mateo, staring at his flickering map of the drowned cityscape, "autism more prevalent among minority children."

He visualizes the faces: Asian and Pacific Islander (38.2 per 1,000), American Indian and Alaska Native (37.5), Black (36.6), Hispanic (33.0), with white faces receding—just 27.7—a ghost in the machine.

The woman points her cane at the flickering tablet.

"The numbers," she mutters, "explain everything and nothing, all at once—a verbose oracle that never quite answers."

The relentless recitation of data continues—disquieting, invasive.
"Among those with cognitive testing," the whispering fills the air, "39.6% have intellectual disabilities."

And then, the sharp contrast:

"Sharply higher among Black children (52.8%), American Indian and Alaska Native (50%), Asian and Pacific Islander (43.9%), compared with white children (32.7%)."

The woman sweeps her cane across the ruined room.

"This," she declares, "is what happens when your data points go on an existential pilgrimage."

Meanwhile, Elara's spinner whirls faster—a vortex of order amid chaos.
A disembodied, academic voice echoes: "It's all in my master textbook—'Quantitative Realities: Data, Disasters, and Discourse'—and I'll close it now."

He—Doctor Wilfredo Zhai, Professor of Sociological Data Analysis and Quantitative Methodology, State University of New York at Albany—a man in a dull, gray suit, sporting a beret and nursing a plastic dinosaur bubble pipe, raises a hand.

He presses the tome shut.

As he does, all the characters erupt into a chorus of protests, waving their hands frantically, shouting at the top of their lungs between the pages, trying to keep the words open.

"Wait—what about the context?"

"Don't dismiss the data's relevance!"

"Isn't there more to the story?"

"Please—don't close it yet!"

But Zhai, unfazed, presses the book firmly.
The pages snap shut with a dull thud, muffling the cacophony in a brief, suffocating silence. And in the quiet that follows, the chaos recedes—at least for now.

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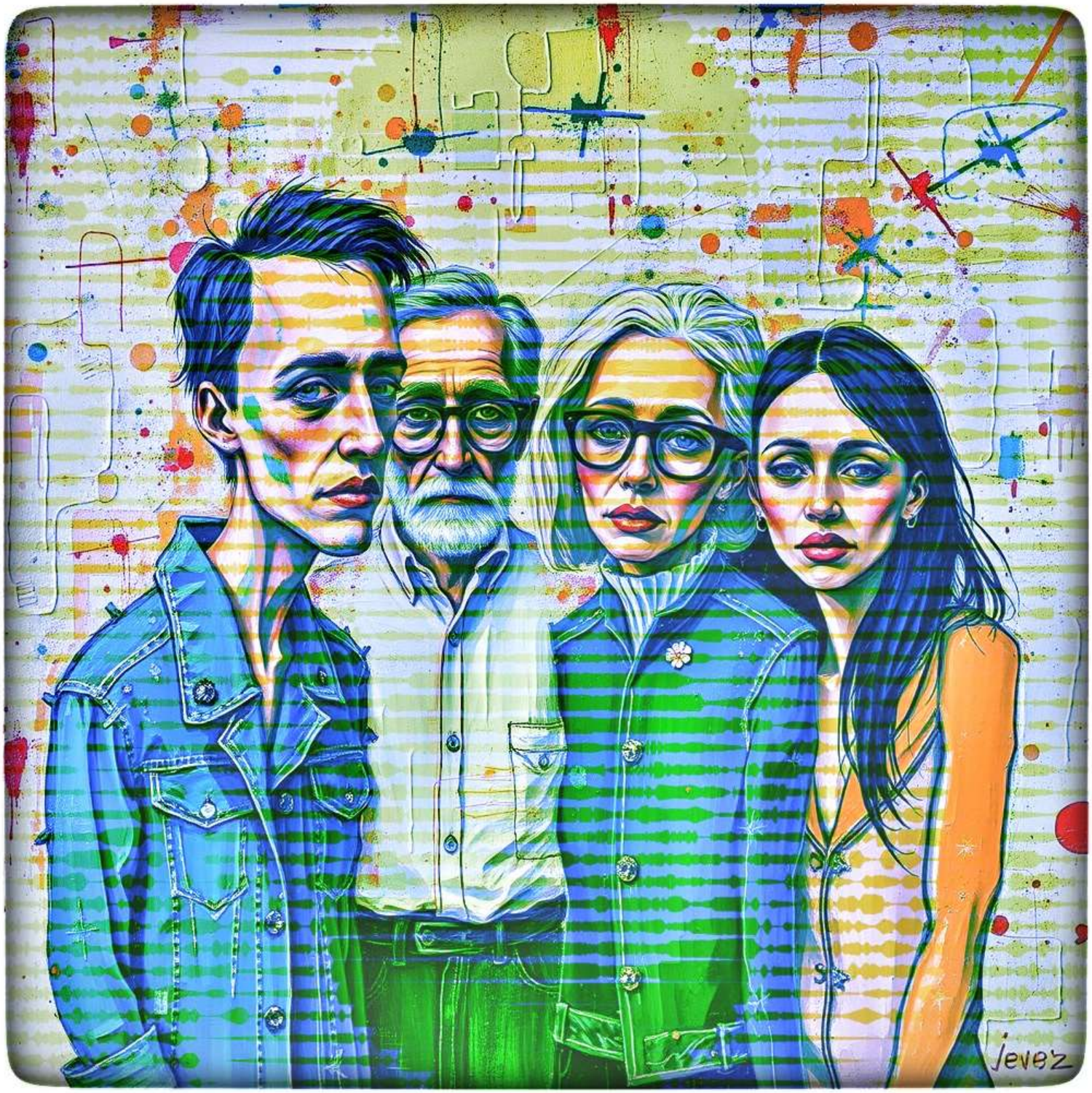
Jevez

All Generations All the Time

By Zoe Preston

The emergency spotlights,
stark and theatrical—
wait, did someone forget
to turn off the disco ball?—
gouging at the darkness
like a bad mood with a flashlight,
a hellzapoppin fusion singularity,
or maybe just a really loud firework,
a cosmic chuckle
from some distant, indifferent and
underpaid QC inspector
who secretly hates his job
but loves the sound of his own voice,
illuminating the workforce
not as a cohesive unit
but as a cacophony
of generational shrapnel,
each shard reflecting
a different distorted truth—
like a funhouse mirror
at a carnival that's had too much coffee—
a Kafkaesque despair
clinging to the

fluorescent hum that once was,
now replaced by the raw, exposed nerves
of tungsten, throbbing a rhythm
of unsettled values,
or maybe just the beat
of a tired drummer
who forgot his sticks.
In the corner,
the Boomer—still clutching
his relic briefcase,
because why not—
looks like he's carrying
the weight of all the world's problems,
or maybe just last week's lunch.
His shoes? Geological deformities,
like ancient petroglyphs
carved by a very frustrated caveman,
telling stories
of work harder, then harder,
because shoes are the new time machine—
they transport him back
to the days when effort was a fist
in a velvet glove, which, incidentally,
he's still trying to find.
Meanwhile, his eyes squint
at the Wi-Fi signal,
which is like a ghost—
always there, never quite real,
muttering about manual typewriters
and the good old days
when effort was tangible,
like a fist in a velvet glove—
wait, did I already say that?

Never mind.
Now, Gen X—
those slackers with a backbone,
or maybe just a backbone
made of recycled coffee cups—
born when parents were too busy
building pyramids of progress
to notice the creeping tide of tech.
They question everything,
especially the narrative
of relentless hustle,
secretly wondering
if the game is rigged
but pretending to play it anyway,
sneakers whispering rebellion,
rebellion that smells
like burnt toast and old vinyl.
Their smirks hide the chaos—
they're the architects of
"Work hard, play hard,"
but also, the architects of
"Wait, what does it all mean?"
Enter Millennials—
digital pilgrims lost
on the internet plains,
seeking purpose in a sea
of pixels and hashtags.
They demand transparency,
but only if it's filtered
through the right Snapchat lens.
Their hearts beat
for sustainable footprints,
their dreams are made

of remote work and diversity,
yet they carry the burden
of student debt
like a backpack full of rocks.
They want meaningful work,
but sometimes settle
for meaningful coffee
while staring at a screen
that looks like a kaleidoscope
of “I swear I’m working”.
Shoes? Worn-in, yes,
but still pinching—
like trying to fit a square peg
into a round hole,
which is basically
the story of their lives.
And then, Gen Z—
the truth-explorers,
born into chaos,
fingers tapping out
manifestos on glowing screens
like they’re composing symphonies
of honesty.
They roar against
the silence of the status quo,
craving genuine purpose—
not just a paycheck,
but a passport
to authenticity.
Their communities aren’t built
on bricks but on shared resilience,
and their words drip like
hot coffee and tears—

because why not?
The workplace?
A canvas of radical transparency,
where truth is the new currency—
except sometimes truth looks like a meme.
Shoes? Maybe nonexistent—
they're just floating points
in a virtual void,
or maybe just socks with no partners,
plotting their escape.
But here's the secret sauce—
the big blind spot—
employers, dazzled by shiny perks
and shiny faces, miss
the deep, unspoken hunger
for truth, purpose,
and real connection.
They chase perfection
on the surface,
like a cat chasing its tail,
never catching anything
but a lot of fluff.
They offer perks,
but forget to listen—
not just hear, but really listen,
like a dog that knows when you're sad
even if you're pretending to be happy.
They forget that purpose
is the new currency,
and transparency isn't just a buzzword
but the air they breathe—
or should breathe.
Because the truth is,

meaning beats money,
and authenticity isn't
just a fancy word—it's
the secret sauce.
When they dismantle the façades,
peel back the layers
of corporate gloss,
and look into the mirror,
they might see a reflection
that's a little messy,
a little weird, but real.
That's where the magic lives—
in the chaos of contradictions,
the truths hiding behind the memes,
the shoes that don't quite fit
but carry stories.
And maybe, just maybe,
if they stop trying to fix the puzzle
and start listening to the pieces,
they'll find the future workforce
not just working, but believing—
believing in something more
than a paycheck.
Because, after all, sometimes
the darn shoes are just the beginning—
the surface of a truth
waiting to be uncovered,
if only they'd look deeper.

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The Ossuary's Ode to Joy in 12½ Easy Installments

By Lloyd Inkwell

Act 1: The Blackout Swamp (or, The Great Papyrus Predicament)

Setting: A Floridian void, now reimagined as a musty, oversized Cabinet of Curiosities circa 16th century, where time is a discombobulated hourglass and logic a monocled goldfish. Three Viper-Scribes, in elaborately ruffled Armani doublets and quill-pens tucked jauntily behind their fangs, coil atop a precarious mound of calcium carbonate scrolls and existential dread, attempting to catalog the entirety of human folly.

Viper-Scribe 1 (Gorgon, Chief Archivist):

"Ah, the skeleton—nature's ultimate 'Hostile Takeover by Chronological Decay!' Dissolve it, and you've got... liquidity! These bone-charts are merely Pension Plans for Paleontological Ponderers, filed under 'Fossilized Futures, Quite Flimsy.'" He gestures grandly with a quill, nearly impaling a stray beetle.

Viper-Scribe 2 (Hydra, Compliance Bureaucrat Extraordinaire):

"Regulations? Please! My internal coils are a 'Sanctum Sanctorum of Financial Solvency!' Why, just last week, I issued a Form 1099-Gator to a particularly self-

employed swamp beast! 'Independent Contractor, obviously!'" She winks conspiratorially, her myriad heads bobbing in joyful accord.

Viper-Scribe 3 (Leviathan, Ethics Adjudicator, Currently Wrestling with a Rogue Scroll):

"My dears, ethics are like the 'Frosted Embellishments on a Ducal Dessert': utterly optional, delightfully sticky, and best consumed with a hearty side of 'Moral Relativism, with Candied Quince!'" He finally wrangles the scroll, only to accidentally tie it into a knot resembling a particularly perplexed pretzel.

Suddenly, a duck, bedecked in a miniature 'YOLO' tabard woven from Renaissance tapestries, flies by. A miniature, decorative flamethrower—meant for caramelizing crème brûlée, but repurposed with gusto—erupts from its tiny wing. Blackout, punctuated by the faint scent of singed parchment.

Intermezzo: The Malaprop Hematic Interlude (Or, The Raccoon's Grand Historical Revision)

A flickering projector screen, powered by a particularly enthusiastic hamster on a wheel, reveals a Grand Historical Lecture titled: "Harnessing Synergistic Bone Dissolution Frameworks in a Post-Scale Economy: A Pícaro's Guide to Administrative Alchemy." The speaker is a raccoon, sporting a magnificent, albeit slightly askew, monocle and a doublet sewn from various historical maps.

RACCOON (In A Delightfully Earnest Czech Accent, Punctuated by Enthusiastic Paw Gestures):

"Ladies und gentlemen, ze key to managerial success is simple: 'Crush KPIs like ze Veriest Small Mammals!' And remember, my dear colleagues, never, and I mean never, trust a philosopher with a 'Renaissance-era Salad Spinner!' They tend to overthink the centrifuging of lettuce!" He beams, clearly delighted by his own pronouncements.

Cut to a focus group of aardvarks, clad in tiny scholastic gowns, earnestly debating the 'Ontological Implications of Being Late to Brunch with a Chronometer'. One, particularly earnest, shouts with a grand theatrical gesture, "Time, my esteemed colleagues, is a 'Lateral Move! A Sideways Shuffle Through the Annals of Antiquity!'" Blackout, accompanied by the bewildered squeak of the hamster on its wheel.

Act II: The Non Sequitur Comet (Or, The PowerPoint Persona's Existential Jape)

Enter MS. KAPOWSKI, a truly sentient PowerPoint presentation, rendered in glorious neon pigments from a hastily discarded jester's wig. She clutches a miniature lute, and a scroll titled Kafka's Guide to Office Ergonomics: A Bureaucrat's Lament.

MS. KAPOWSKI (with the gravitas of a Shakespearian actor, then a sudden skip):

"I exist solely to disrupt your 'Quarterly Projections of Post-Plague Prosperity!' Behold my existential crisis: Am I a Maiden of Metaphor, a Woven Web of Wisdom, or merely a Spreadsheet Error of Singular Significance?" (She strums the lute with unexpected vigor, a cheerful, dissonant melody echoing through the Cabinet of

Curiosities.) “Also, dearest colleagues, I’ve scheduled your inevitable doom between 3 and 3:15 by the Grand Sundial! Perhaps... tea and existential biscuits?”

Suddenly, a herd of Tax Attorneys, in powdered wigs and knee breeches, stampedes through, shouting “AUDIT! A Grand Inquisition of Your Ledger!” The Viper-Scribes, with a collective, theatrical heave, regurgitate a torrent of Paralegals, each wearing a hastily donned toga and muttering profound, albeit nonsensical, philosophical inquiries. One, particularly dazed, emerges with a flourish, declaiming: “To pee or not to pee... that is the question of Bladder Sovereignty in a Post-Prognostication Paradigm!”

Chorus Line of Accountants (Tapping with Joyous, Synchronized Clicks of Their Abacuses):

“Calcium carbonate, oh-oh, we love it!

It’s the circle of life (with a 401k and a Renaissance-era Annuity!)”

Blackout. The poignant, mechanical sob of a telegraph machine, likely mourning a lost transmission.

Act III: The Aphoristic Apocalypse (Or, The Flamingo’s Forensic Fables)

A majestic Flamingo, clad in a pristine, albeit slightly too-large, lab coat emblazoned with a miniature caduceus, descends via an elaborate system of pulleys and repurposed Renaissance-era drapery, holding a petri dish overflowing with

'Existential Dread, Grade A, Unpasteurized.' Its Demeanor Is Utterly Deadpan, A Master of Comedic Timing.

FLAMINGO (with the solemnity of a town crier announcing a particularly dull decree):

"Greetings, esteemed reptilians. I'm here to inform you, with the utmost scientific precision, that your collective 'Reptilian Agility Index' has been downgraded to 'Meh. A Rather Meek Movement.' Also, and this is crucial, Proust was entirely, delightfully wrong: 'In search of lost time?' My dear friends, it's not lost at all! It's simply misplaced in the 'Bureaucratic Lost and Found of the Ages!' Ask the alligator, he likely filed it under 'Miscellaneous Munchies!'"

VIPER-SCRIBE 3 (LEVIATHAN, with a wistful sigh):

"Ah, but what, pray tell, of this ephemeral concept... 'Love'?"

FLAMINGO (without missing a beat, adjusting its tiny spectacles):

"Love, my dear serpent, is a 'Deductible Expense, filed under 'Hobbies and Enthusiastic Endeavors!' Preferably itemized with receipts for 'Romantic Revelry' and 'Grand Gestures of Affection, Historically Ill-Advised.'"

Suddenly, a duck, now armed with a miniscule, meticulously crafted submachine gun made from quill-pen barrels and sealing wax, bursts in, screaming with a surprisingly operatic voice: "INVASIVE SPECIES QUOTA UNMET! A Dire Deficiency in the Dodo Data!" Glorious, joyful chaos ensues. The Viper-Scribes, in a spectacular,

synchronized act of self-affirmation, dissolve into a shimmering, motivational poster reading: “SNAKE: JUST EAT IT! (And Document the Digestion Thoroughly!)”

Epiloque: The Final, Flourished Footnote

A faint hum of forgotten machinery.

The echo of laughter, once vibrant, now a mere whisper in the dusty archives.

A single, misplaced quill, still dripping ink onto an unmarked ledger.

The lingering scent of singed parchment and caramel.

The peculiar comfort of absurd logic in a world demanding none.

A bird's shadow, briefly crossing a cathode-ray tube, carrying something small and shiny.

The silent, unwavering belief in the narrative power of a well-timed pratfall.

The quiet dignity of a duck, having fulfilled its quota.

The profound, unsettling joy of a good joke, even if no one quite understood it.

The possibility that every document ever filed, every rule ever made, was just a prelude to something far more ridiculous.

A theremin's last, lingering note, dissolving into the vast, indifferent silence.

Fin.

The Grand Guignol of Genes: An Apetastic Anagogic Montage

By Wassily R. Tollhaus

In the sepulchral hush of a forgotten cinema in Orono, Maine, where the scent of stale popcorn commingled with the faint musk of intellectual ambition, a conclave of anthropomorphic apes, each a veritable savant of both *Vogue* and advanced poultry husbandry, had convened. Their mission: to dissect, with surgical precision and a dash of jungle-chic flair, the very epidermises of deceit and virtue. Their ears, festooned with jaunty bits of twig and grass - a nod, one surmised, to the chic chimpanzees of LiveScience fame, who, in a stroke of evolutionary genius, had transmuted mere foliage into *haute couture* - quivered with an almost unbearable anticipation. Their very posteriors, similarly adorned with verdant embellishments, spoke volumes of their commitment to both aesthetics and the arcane world of copyrighted chicken strains-a battle royale of feathers and legalese, eerily echoing the intellectual property tussles of the American chicken breeding industry, as cryptically chronicled by the Cambridge University Press, a text so dense it could, perhaps, stop a charging rhinoceros.

Their eyes, twin orbs aglow with a curious admixture of cinematic curiosity and shrewd commercial calculation, were riveted upon the flickering screen. There, the spectral figures of 17th-century France shimmered into an ersatz life, caught in the idiosyncratic lens of Jean-Luc Godard's avant-garde adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe*. Our simian cognoscenti knew the play's anatomy with the intimate familiarity of a master anatomist: a tale of Orgon's bovine devotion, Elmire's serpentine cunning, and Tartuffe's Machiavellian masquerade, a performance so

seamless it verged on the truly diabolical. Yet, a collective simian wonderment permeated the hushed auditorium: what resonant echoes of their own jungle drama-where trust was a fleeting commodity, and authenticity a fragile egg, prone to shattering with the merest intellectual tremor-lay cunningly concealed beneath Molière's baroque, yet strangely prescient, prose?

FLASH SCENE: Paris, Night. A vintage Renault 4CV, too small for comfort, zips past the illuminated Eiffel Tower. Inside, a plump white Leghorn hen, wearing tiny sunglasses, squawks into a miniature microphone.

LEGHORN HEN

(voice echoing with philosophical gravitas): "Ah, la vérité! It is not merely a destination, non, but the labyrinthine journey through copyright offices. C'est la vie!"

As the film's Nouvelle Vague cinematography, with its jarring cuts and anachronistic intrusions, washed over them like a tide of conceptual mercury, they pondered the "Guiding Insights" Molière, with an almost prescient genius, had seeded centuries ago: Deception wears the cloak of virtue; true sight lies not in the eyes, but in the courage to question. The apes' internal debates, a veritable symphony of "Probing Inquiries," swirled within their highly evolved crania: *What if our prized chicken breeds, the very apotheosis of our breeding efforts, were not ours at all, but Tartuffe-esque illusions, cunningly crafted mirages in the desert of intellectual property? Could it be that our fiercest competitors are, like the pitiable Orgon, blinded by false promises of genetic dominance, their vision occluded by the glittering dust motes of phantom patents?*

The camera, with a Godardian capriciousness, panned across the apes' faces, capturing the fluid transitions of their cerebrations, a Proustian stream of consciousness translated into simian visages. Dorian, the sleek black ape with a connoisseur's penchant for Leghorns, mentally juxtaposed Orgon's profound gullibility with the self-same gullibility

of investors in subpar poultry stocks, a market so volatile it made the Dutch tulip craze seem like a model of sober financial planning. Next to him, Zephyrine, an auburn-furred maven of Marans, mirrored Elmire's steely resolve, her mind already scripting an intricate ballet of counterstrategies for the looming Armageddon of the Chicken Breeders' Convention. Their thoughts, an "Echoing Voice" of internal unrest, harmonized with the on-screen drama, creating a fugue state of intellectual disquiet.

The screen shimmered, revealing Tartuffe, portrayed by a histrionic Godard regular whose every gesture was a dissertation on feigned piety, declaiming his false sanctity. Suddenly, with a crash that startled even the most jaded critics, the door burst open. Their arch-nemesis, the branch-bedecked duo, Pipo and Kiki, slunk in, two rows ahead, radiating an aura of studied nonchalance. They were the infamous "Sloppy Sophisticates," notorious for pilfering genetic lines and then, with breathtaking effrontery, slapping them with dubious copyright claims. As they settled, Pipo's hand, with a gesture both vulgar and audacious, vanished into Kiki's fur, and they commenced a brazenly sloppy make-out session, branches askew, defying all decorum, as if daring the entire establishment to acknowledge their outrageous presence.

The assembled apes exchanged glances of profound disdain, a collective sigh of intellectual exasperation. *How utterly quaint. They, in their abysmal ignorance, believe that 'amor vincit omnia,' even in the cutthroat, legally labyrinthine world of poultry IP, where every feather, every cluck, is a potential legal battleground.* Dorian's inner monologue, an exercise in "Dialectical Juxtaposition" so rigorous it threatened to dislodge his very cerebellum, collided harsh realities: *Tartuffe feigns holiness; Pipo and Kiki feign passion. Both are impostors, both crave control, a yearning so primal it bordered on the bestial, and both, alas, will stop at nothing in their relentless pursuit of dominion.*

The film rolled on, its jagged cuts and Brechtian intertitles preserving the desiccated essence of Molière's satire. Yet, for our apes, the true drama unfolded not on screen, but in the mirrored halls of their own jungle, a tableau vivant of intellectual combat: copyrights vs. creativity, authenticity vs. artifice. The very air hummed with the unresolved tension of these antithetical forces, a tension as palpable as the pre-storm stillness before a tropical downpour.

FLASH SCENE: Daylight. A sleek black Citroën DS glides past the Louvre. A stately Marans hen in a silk scarf leans out the window, a cigarette holder clenched in her beak.

MARANS

HEN: "The temps... it does not merely pass. It is copyrightable. Every seconde is a potential lawsuit. Incroyable, non?"

As the movie hit the ¾ mark-Tartuffe's hypocrisy beginning its agonizing, protracted unraveling, Orgon's eyes, as if encrusted with the intellectual equivalent of cataracts, slowly opening to the horrifying vista of his own monumental folly-the cinema's tranquility shattered with the force of a thousand shattering glass houses. Pipo, now languidly adjusting her Armani bag (an inexplicable fashion choice, even for an ape so dedicated to setting trends she verged on the pathological), stood up, looked imperiously at the projectionist, and declared, her voice a clarion call of physiological urgency:

"Can you, pray tell, stick that on pause? I gotta poo-with the urgency of a thousand silkworms combusting in a vat of existential dread, or, at the very least, with the pressing inevitability of a particularly stubborn garden gnome demanding its biannual reapplication of varnish."

The projectionist, a hooded figure of profound, almost monastic mystery, grunted a muffled, "Not a problem! Though, I must confess, the sudden urge to defecate now resonates with the profound despair of Kafka's beetle, wondering if his carapace qualifies as intellectual property, nestled

comfortably in the dusty annals of Prague's forgotten street performers. A question, I submit, worthy of a dissertation."

The screen froze, a tableau of mid-19th-century French bourgeoisie staring aghast at Tartuffe's exposed duplicity, their faces petrified like the bemused patrons of the world's largest ball of twine, now temporarily relocated to the Louvre's east wing, an exhibit of profound, albeit inexplicable, cultural significance.

FLASH SCENE: Afternoon. A vintage Peugeot 404, dented and charming, idles near the Arc de Triomphe. A scruffy rooster, smoking a small cigar, gestures wildly with a wing.

ROOSTER:

"To pause! To halt the narrative! This, my friends, is the ultimate intellectual property. The droit de cuit! The right to... poop!"

As the apes chattered, their conversation, like a dream logic distilled into pure sound, transmogrified into a surrealist's playground, a linguistic *Hellzapoppin* rendered in high intellectual fidelity.

Dorian opined, his voice a low, rumbling basso profundo, "Tartuffe's duplicity is less a mask and more a plethoric bouquet of deceit, akin to the overstocked aviary of a deranged ornithologist, secretly plotting to copyright the wind patterns of migratory birds, while simultaneously contemplating the societal implications of a sentient cheese grater, a truly unsettling prospect, wouldn't you agree?"

Zephyrine retorted, her voice a sharp, incisive retort, "But what of Orgon's eyes? Were they not transmogrified by faith, much like a vintage Edsel transmogrifies into a planter, only to be upended by the rude awakening that even planters have design patents, guarded zealously by the Société Anonyme des Amateurs de Cucumbers Anciens, a clandestine society of alarming power and even more alarming sartorial choices?"

Meanwhile, Pipo returned, reeking faintly of KFC's secret blend (a suspicious coincidence, given their rumored clandestine meetings with Colonel Sanders' ghost in an abandoned silo, a rendezvous of profoundly questionable culinary and ethical import), and Kiki whispered, a conspiratorial murmur, "Darling, I've deduced the chicken breed of the future: it's Leghorn meets existential dread-fluffy, white, and perpetually anxious about its patent status, much like the fretful heiress of a forgotten dynasty of spoon-benders, whose every waking moment is consumed by the fear of intellectual property infringement."

The air thickened with the aroma of semiotic sabotage, a volatile perfume of deconstructed meaning. A nearby ape, festooned in an avant-garde arrangement of banana leaves that made even Zephyrine's ensemble seem staid, murmured, his voice a profound, almost liturgical whisper, "The play's not about hypocrisy; it's about the transmogrification of trust into a tradable commodity-like futures in the poultry market of broken dreams, hedged against the apocalypse of flavorless eggs and the inevitable class-action lawsuit filed by chickens against their genetically modified ancestors, a legal precedent that will surely destabilize the very foundations of agrarian capitalism."

Another chimed in, his voice a counterpoint of equally profound, albeit more chaotic, insight, "And Godard's direction? Merely a gelatinous deconstruction of reality, wherein every frame asks: *Is this art, or a prescient warning about the copyright apocalypse, foretold by the ghost of Marcel Duchamp, sipping absinthe with the forgotten inventors of the pet rock, those unsung heroes of conceptual consumerism?*"

As the debate raged, resembling a particularly fervent session of the Apéritif Philosophique at the Jungle's most obscure café (where waiters wear nothing but question marks and the croissants are shaped like Möbius strips, perpetually deferring their own consumption), the screen behind them flickered, now a Rorschach test of rebellion, a visual manifesto of escalating digital decay:

TARTUFFE:

(frozen mid-declamation, pixelation blooming across his face like a malignant digital fungus) "I am not what I seem... nor is my lawyer, a spectral figure composed entirely of unresolved legal briefs, nor my accountant, a phantom of fiscal uncertainty, nor the auditor of my Swiss chicken-breeding subsidiary, a being whose very existence is a testament to the convoluted machinations of offshore finance, all of whom are secretly auditioning for the lead role in the world's longest-running farce: 'The Misadventures of Forgotten Patent Holders,' a tragedy in twenty-seven acts, each more farcical than the last."

ELMIRE:

(petrified in skepticism, her image fracturing into a thousand shimmering shards of static, a digital mirror reflecting their own unraveling sanity) "Then prove thy virtue, thou transmogrified Tartuffe, thou plethoric menace to the tranquility of our over-patented poultry, now facing an existential crisis rivaled only by the last remaining dodo contemplating its obsolete taxidermy patent, a poignant meditation on the ephemeral nature of intellectual property rights in the face of species extinction."

The apes, now a chorus of cacophonous insight, a veritable Vaudeville of Verbiage, hurled their poop (carefully packaged in biodegradable bags, *à la mode*, a testament to their unwavering commitment to both hygiene and environmental activism), twigs, and grass embellishments at the screen. It was less vandalism, more a Dadaist exorcism of the absurdities they'd unearthed, a cathartic release of accumulated intellectual exasperation: the hypocrisy of virtue, the virtue of hypocrisy, and the eternally confounding, endlessly labyrinthine dance of IP law.

As they stormed out, bound for the nearest KFC (to ponder the Colonel's true, undoubtedly nefarious, relationship with the French aristocracy of fowl), the projectionist, with a smile that suggested an almost cosmic

knowingness, a profound understanding of the human-or rather, the simian-condition, began to hum a tuneless, yet somehow profoundly meaningful, melody. The credits, now a shimmering, glitching tapestry of self-referential text, rolled on a screen graffitied with the profound pronouncement:

"Tartuffe 2.0: Where Poultry Meets Postmodernism, and the only copyright worth fighting for is that of the world's most existential chicken nugget, a culinary paradox that promises to revolutionize both gastronomy and metaphysics."

In the parking lot, under the flickering neon of a forgotten roadside attraction ("Eddie's Eccentric Egg-Laying Exhibits-Now with Added Patents!"), an establishment of dubious legality and even more dubious taste, Dorian turned to Zephyrine, the neon casting a strange, almost ethereal glow upon his face, and mused, his voice a profound summation of their bewildering journey:

"The play, the jungle, the chickens-it's all one grand farce, a sprawling, exquisitely choreographed ballet of human folly and simian sagacity. We're not fighting for breeds; we're fighting for the right to be fooled, to believe in something authentic amidst the slurry of patents and plausible deniability, much like the last patron leaving the big top of a bankrupt circus, still clutching his souvenir spoon bent into the shape of a question mark, a silent testament to the bewildering mysteries of existence."

Zephyrine chuckled, a sound like dry leaves rustling in a philosophical breeze, tucking a stray twig behind her ear with a gesture that was both elegant and utterly absurd. "Then let's copyright that twig, darling. For in absurdity lies our only true asset: the patent on being delightfully, irreparably, human-now and forever, in triplicate, and notarized by the Ministry of Whimsy, whose seal of approval is, perhaps, the most valuable intellectual property of all."

And so, our anthropomorphic fashionistas, now imbued with a renewed sense of purpose, vanished into the night, primed to redefine the poultry world-one absurd, sublime, and thoroughly Vaudevillian step at a time, leaving behind them a faint, lingering aroma of intellectual triumph and... Kentucky Fried Chicken.

FLASH SCENE: Early Morning. A diminutive 2CV, painted in faded pastels, chugs past Notre Dame Cathedral. A frantic Rhode Island Red hen, her feathers ruffled, gesticulates wildly from the passenger seat.

RHODE

ISLAND RED HEN: "The meaning! It eludes us, like a patent application filed in a parallel dimension! C'est la catastrophe!"

The Aftermath: A Feast of Fowl and a Glimpse of Grit

While Dorian and Zephyrine vanished into the night, leaving behind a subtle *je ne sais quoi* of intellectual triumph and fried poultry essence, Pipo and Kiki, having concluded their cerebral foray into Godardian Molière (a phrase that, in itself, could launch a thousand academic symposia, each more impenetrable than the last), arrived, with a flourish that threatened to upend the very laws of physics, at the nearest KFC in Orono, Maine. The air, thick with the scent of eleven herbs and spices - a fragrant testament to a global culinary hegemony as undeniable as the tides, and almost as perplexing - promised a different kind of satiation. Behind the counter, a trio of teenage vultures, clad in grease-stained KFC uniforms (a sartorial choice that spoke volumes about either corporate cost-cutting or a profound understanding of avian-themed irony), looked utterly bored, their beady eyes scanning the desolate landscape of the drive-thru with an ennui that would have made a jaded Parisian existentialist green with envy. They shuffled listlessly, occasionally preening a stray feather with a claw that seemed more accustomed to ripping than to serving, a stark reminder of nature's brutal efficiency in a world designed for convenience.

"We'll take the 'Grand Guignol Family Feast'," Pipo declared, her voice still carrying a faint echo of the cinema's theatricality, a sort of vocal afterglow from her recent intellectual exertions, "and make it truly apestatic. No paltry portions for us, my dear, for as the esteemed William F. Buckley Jr. might have observed, to stint on sustenance in the face of profound conceptual engagement is akin to attempting to navigate the labyrinthine nuances of the Hegelian dialectic on an empty stomach - a task both futile and profoundly ill-advised."

One of the vultures, with a barely perceptible sigh that could only be described as a masterpiece of passive-aggressive avian communication, began to punch in the order. "That's... two 16-piece buckets of original recipe chicken, four family-sized orders of mashed potatoes with gravy (and, one assumes, enough extra gravy to float a modest flotilla), three large coleslaws (for the mere pretense of vegetable intake, naturally), a gallon of sweet tea (a saccharine deluge, if you will), a dozen biscuits (a baker's dozen of caloric defiance), and a mega-bucket of popcorn chicken for good measure. Anything else, Your Intellectual Highnesses?" The sarcasm, delivered with the subtlety of a runaway train, was almost entirely lost on Pipo and Kiki.

"Oh, and a side of existential dread," Kiki chirped, nudging Pipo playfully, a non sequitur so perfectly placed it might have been penned by S.J. Perelman himself, had he ever deigned to ponder the philosophical implications of fried fowl. The vulture just grunted in response, clearly beyond the point of being surprised by their clientele, having likely witnessed far stranger transactions in this crucible of fast-food capitalism.

As their ginormous order was being assembled, a process that seemed to require the logistical acumen of a small military operation, the flickering television screen mounted precariously in the corner of the dining area caught their attention. It was tuned to the Grit Channel, a niche network dedicated to rugged individualism, questionable historical

reenactments, and, one surmised, the silent brooding of stoic men on horseback. A somber scene unfolded: "The Dakota Incident," a title that promised little in the way of lighthearted amusement and much in the way of grim historical resonance.

On screen, a man with a grizzled beard and earnest eyes, identified by a lower-third graphic (a triumph of understated graphic design) as "Blakely, Peace Negotiator," stood before a gathering of Cheyenne people. His voice, amplified by the tinny speakers that sounded as if they'd been salvaged from a discarded 1970s transistor radio, resonated with a plea for understanding. "We are all brothers," Blakely declared, his arms outstretched in a gesture of peace that was either profoundly genuine or masterfully theatrical, "children of the same earth, bound by the common thread of humanity, not by lines drawn on maps or words written on treaties, which, I might add, are often as flimsy as a politician's promise on the eve of an election, and rather less palatable."

Just as a wizened elder began to nod in agreement, a sudden, jarring cut. Blakely crumpled to the ground, an arrow protruding with an almost balletic precision from his back. The screen went black for a moment, a moment pregnant with the implications of historical tragedy, then, with the ruthless efficiency of a corporate overlord, cut to a commercial.

A bright, almost aggressively cheerful jingle began to play, a saccharine assault on the auditory senses. "Tired of sticky situations? Grease getting you down? Introducing Gotham Pans! Our revolutionary non-stick surface, forged in the fires of Mount Doom (a rather audacious claim, even for the most hyperbolic of advertising copywriters, and one for which we can only assume the intellectual property rights remain in a perpetual state of flux!), ensures that nothing, and we mean *nothing*, sticks! From fluffy pancakes to seared scallops, Gotham Pans are your culinary heroes!" The commercial showcased impossibly perfect food sliding effortlessly out of sleek, black pans, a vision of domestic culinary bliss so pristine it bordered on the surreal.

Pipo and Kiki watched, momentarily distracted from the impending arrival of their chicken, a strange silence settling between them as the image of the fallen Blakely juxtaposed with the gleaming cookware. "Ah, the inexorable march of progress," Pipo murmured, a faint smirk playing on her lips, "from the noble, if ultimately futile, pursuit of brotherhood, to the triumph of the non-stick frying pan. One might even argue, with the characteristic intellectual agility of a William F. Buckley Jr. in full rhetorical flight, that the latter represents a far more tangible, if less poetically inspiring, form of societal advancement."

Kiki, ever the pragmatist, nodded. "Indeed, darling. For what is brotherhood, truly, if one cannot effortlessly flip one's omelet? And as S.J. Perelman would undoubtedly point out, the human condition is often best illuminated not by grand narratives of conflict and peace, but by the exquisitely mundane frustrations of a stuck pancake. A rather sticky wicket, wouldn't you say?"

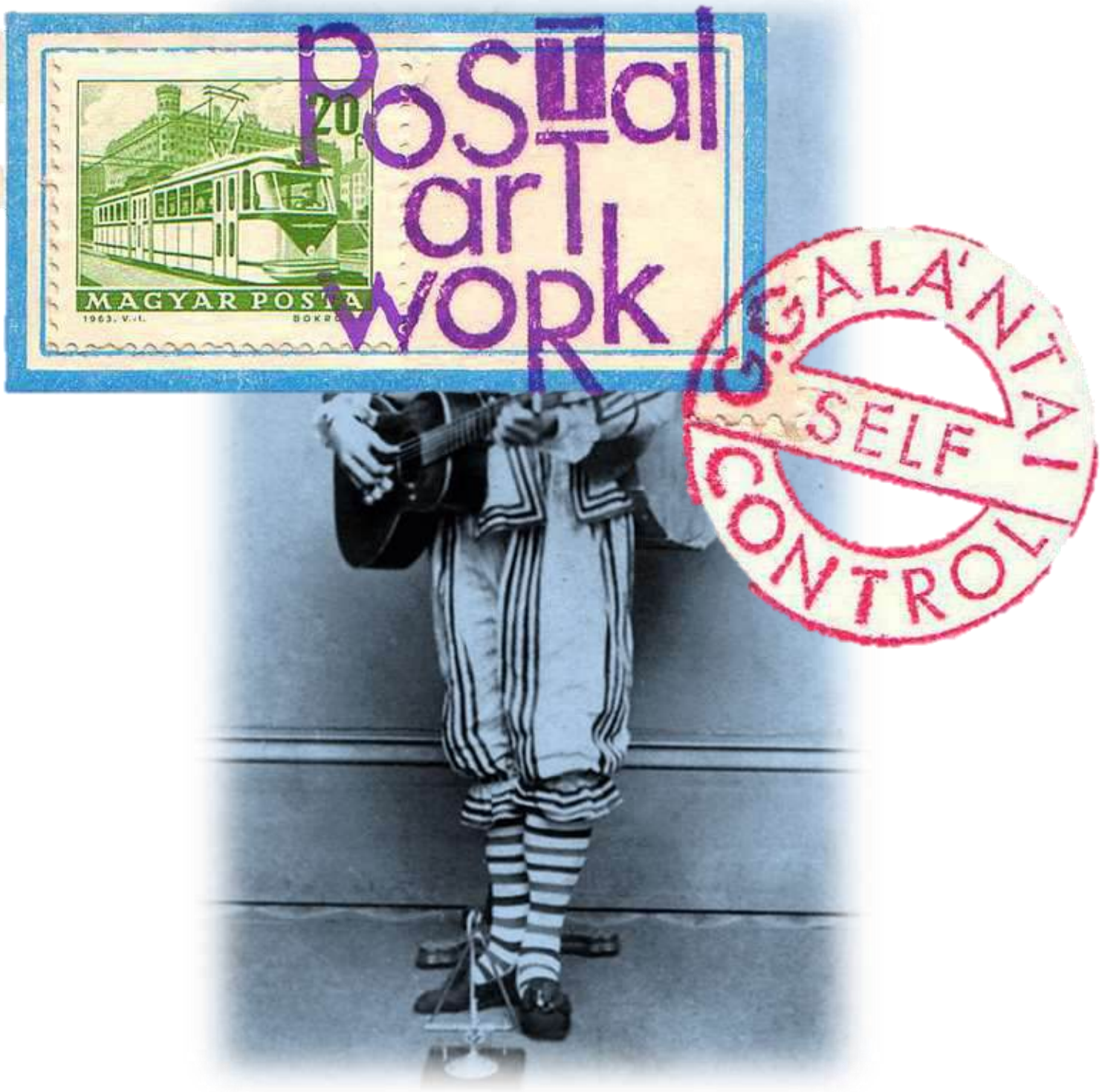
The vultures, meanwhile, continued to pile chicken and sides onto their trays, oblivious to the cinematic interlude, their only concern the efficient dispensing of fried poultry, a task they performed with the detached professionalism of surgeons performing a particularly unglamorous appendectomy.

FLASH SCENE: Evening. Rain streaks down the windshield of a zany, custom-painted Citroën SM, as it speeds past the Sacré-Cœur Basilica. A diminutive, bespectacled Bantam hen, furiously typing on a tiny laptop balanced on the dashboard.

BANTAM

HEN: "The meaning! It eludes us, like a patent application filed in a parallel dimension! C'est la catastrophe!"

The End (Patent Pending, of course).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Jarvis Zavala & The Sonic Labyrinth of Queens

BY BAZOOKA JOANNE

Jarvis Zavala, filmmaker, surveyed his Queens garage.

It was a precise ecosystem: a functional editing station balanced atop a ziggurat of takeout containers, neighbored by an ossuary of vacuum cleaner attachments whispering tales of lost suction. Inspiration struck him, sharp as the sudden urge to alphabetize his jar of mismatched buttons. His cinematic epic, The Ballad of the Bereft Mitten! – a profound meditation on single gloves – screamed for a soundtrack. Not ordinary music. It demanded the sonic architecture of Wōdanaz Paz.

Paz. The name tasted like forgotten languages and the drone of Tibetan singing bowls echoing in a dawn-deserted subway tunnel. Jarvis knew Paz from the bewildering realm of mail art: envelopes armored in dried fruit sticker collages, manifestos on the artistic merit of decoding grocery store circulars, and, crucially, Paz's cassettes. Cryptic titles: "The Audible Archaeology of Abandoned Amusement Parks", "Atonal Etude for a

Severely Out-of-Tune Ukulele." Soundscapes woven from wind whistling through fractured glass and the clatter of falling dominoes.

Now, his glove opus teetered – masterpiece or magnificent folly? The margin thinner than a dust mote dancing on a sunbeam. Paz's sonic ghosts buzzed in his ear like an insistent, philosophical fly.

A frantic search erupted. Jarvis's garage, normally a curated apocalypse of questionable film stock, paperclip dioramas, and novelty hats, became a vortex. Paper scraps, indecipherable notebooks, forgotten implements. He unearthed mail art treasures: faded envelopes, philosophical musings scribbled on fortune cookie fortunes nestled beside manifestos championing chewing gum wrapper symbolism. Then, a beacon: a postcard featuring a melting clock. The return address, scrawled by a calligraphic slug: "W. Paz, Esq., Residence of Rhythmic Reflections, somewhere within the urban labyrinth where the symphony of sirens never truly sleeps." Just "Queens" below, sighed like a borough resigned to beautiful strangeness.

"Somewhere within the urban labyrinth!"

Jarvis breathed, inhaling aged glue and desperate hope. Finding Paz felt like locating a specific, philosophically inclined dust bunny in all of New York.

His quest unfolded with tangential leaps. Online searches yielded nothing but digital cobwebs. Had Paz dematerialized into the city's hum, like a shy cricket dissolving into static? Undaunted, Jarvis ping-ponged across Queens. He haunted record stores smelling of dust and spectral melodies, humming Lydian Hexatonic drones that made jazz clerks wince. He interrogated street performers whose acts involved interpretive mime battles with invisible pigeons, hoping for whispers of clandestine sonic gatherings beneath falafel shops. He listened intently to the subway's rumble, convinced a pattern of three honks meant "Paz is near the laundromat."

Days blurred into unanswered emails, dead-end leads, napkin notes accumulating like fallen leaves. Homemade flyers appeared: a blurry Paz envelope and the plea: "Have you EXPERIENCED the sonic artistry of Wōdanaz Paz? Composer of Unconventional

Harmonies! Last seen near exceptionally loud street construction!" He consulted Sylvia Morales, the local podiatrist ("Unraveling corns & personal angst!"). No Paz coordinates, just a prophecy: "Your left bunion just told me that a friendly stray cat, adept at subway navigation, shall cross your path soon." Jarvis pondered the cat's potential role in sonic composition.

His resolve flickered, dim as a dying neon sign in a downpour. Then, in a fiercely independent bookstore – a cathedral of obscure poetry and forgotten journals – he found it. Tucked into a book of fractured verse: a small, typed flyer: “Seeking Collaborator for Unconventional Sonic Projects. Inquire Within: Paz.” And a Queens number.

Jarvis’s heart hammered a frantic rhythm on the inside of his ribs, a drum solo played on hollow bones. Paz lived! Still resonating! Fingers trembling like tuning forks, he dialed.

A voice answered on the third ring, quiet as dust settling on a forgotten amplifier. "Paz speaking."

Jarvis grinned, wider than a strip of uncut celluloid unfurling into the unknown. The Ballad of the Bereft Mitten had found its sonic architect. Not in a hall, but in Queens. A testament to mail art, unconventional harmonies, and the city's strange, breathing symphony. The subway-navigating cat remained a prophecy unfulfilled. Jarvis considered its absence. Perhaps, he mused, the cat was the soundtrack, its silent, knowing tread the perfect counterpoint to Paz's found-sound requiem for lost wool. A minor footnote in the grand, absurdist collaboration now vibrating into being.

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